DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 197 SO 020 299

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TITLE	Beyond Boundaries: International Education in Our Times. The 1986 Martin Buskin Memorial Lecture.
INSTITUTION	Education Writers Association, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Hegeler Foundation, La Salle, Ill.
PUB DATE	12 Apr 86
NOTE	21p.; Speech presented at the National Seminar of the Education Writers Association (Baltimore, MD, April 12, 1986).
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Writers Association, 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036 ($1.50).
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Foreign Culture; *International Education; *International Educational Exchange; International Programs; International Trade; *Language Attitudes; Postsecondary Education
IDENTIFIERS	USSR

ABSTRACT

The primary reason the United States continues to spend billions of dollars on the arms race is that fears the Soviet Union. This fear is based on lack of understanding that is reinforced by lack of educational exchange programs and language programs. This lack of international insight also dramatically affects the U.S. ability to compete economically with the Pacific Basin countries, cope with Cuban backed insurgency in Central America, and function effectively at the diplomatic level world wide. China has 19,903 students in the United States, while the United States has only 69 students in China. Of the 52 hostages taken in Tehran, Iran, only 2 spoke the Farsi language fluently. There are only two U.S. embassies where the entire staff speaks the language of the host country. In Central America, the United States offers 391 scholarships for study in the United States, while Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the Warsaw Pact countries offer 7,500 scholarships for study in those countries. These trends must be reversed if the United States is to make any gains in international understanding. The Educational Writers Association can play a pivotal role in this matter by keeping these concerns in the public spotlight and supporting measures that foster international understanding. (PPB)

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The 1986
Martin Buskin
Memorial Lecture

BEYOND BOUNDARIES: INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN OUR TIMES

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Presented by
Senator Paul Simon

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A lecture series
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Senator Paul Simon

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The 1986 **Martin Buskin Memorial Lecture** was delivered April 12, 1986 at the Education Writers Association National Seminar in Baltimore, Maryland by Senator Paul Simon of Illinois.

Martin Buskin was education editor for *Newsday* and a past president of EWA. He died suddenly in 1976. The **Buskin Memorial Lecture** was instituted that year to honor his memory. The following persons have delivered the lecture:

1976 Robert Coles, child psychiatrist

1977 Fred M. Hechinger, education writer, *The New York Times*

1978 Haynes Johnson, columnist, *The Washington Post*

1979 Jesse L. Jackson, president, Operation PUSH

1980 Paul Cooperman, president, Institute of Reading Development

1981 Ronald Edmonds, researcher and educator

1982 Diane Ravitch, teacher and writer

1983 Robert Maynard, editor and publisher, *The Oakland Tribune*

1984 Harold Howe, senior lecturer, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University

1985 Edward J. Meade, Jr., program officer, the Ford Foundation

The **Martin Buskin Memorial Lecture** and its printing and distribution are made possible by a continuing grant from the Hegeler Institute of La Salle, Illinois. M. Blouke Carus is the trustee.

ABOUT PAUL SIMON

Paul Simon (D. Ill.) was elected to the United States Senate in 1984. A former education writer and owner of a chain of newspapers in his home state of Illinois, Simon has served in the Illinois House of Representatives and the Illinois Senate. From 1974 to 1984, Simon served four terms in the United States House of Representatives. He currently sits on the Judiciary Committee, the Labor and Human Resources Committee, and the Rules Committee. In the field of education, Simon is perhaps most noted for his efforts to increase public awareness of the importance of foreign language instruction to U.S. foreign policy. Simon is also the author of *The Tongue-Tied American* and numerous articles on the importance of foreign language instruction in the United States.

Beyond Boundaries:
International Education in our Times

I thank you for that generous introduction. You learn in public life that you're never quite sure of the kind of introduction you're going to receive. I spoke some years ago to a convention about one of the books I had written, and the president of the group in introducing me became unintentionally accurate -- something you should never do in introducing a speaker. In describing my book, he said, 'it's the kind of book that once you put it down, you can't pick it up!'

I wish I could claim that I knew Martin Buskin. Obviously, he had a real impact. In any event, I am pleased to be here as part of this lecture series.

I also can claim to have been an education writer. I was a weekly newspaper publisher. In fact, it was the kind of newspaper you're not sure how to spell 'weekly' -- it was that small a newspaper. I was the education writer, the publisher, and also the janitor.

Well, it is a pleasure to be here. While my assigned topic here today is the international aspects of education, when we get to the question and answer period I hope you'll feel free to get into anything you want. Since I give you that freedom, I'm going to take a little bit of that freedom to talk about something that I think indirectly bears on the topic of education, where we are and where we can go. That subject is what we do right now in connection with Libya to counter terrorism and what we did within the last forty-eight hours in a nuclear test in Nevada. The reality is that if we continue the arms race unabated, if we continue to think that we can counter

terrorism with conventional means, and if we continue to act in response to the national passion rather than the national interest, we are not going to have the funds for education, for health delivery, for a lot of other things that are important to this nation.

As far as the test that was conducted -- I want a strong defense for this country, all of us here want a strong defense for this country, but defense is more than arms. Defense is also the kind of education you provide kids. It's a lot of other things. What is our public excuse for going ahead with the arms race? The public reason is that we want to make sure our nuclear warheads still work. My personal belief is that we would all be much better off if we weren't so sure the warheads worked.

But I think the real reason -- this has been published, it's not a classified secret -- is that we want to test a new type of laser weapon that we have because we want to get ahead of the Soviets, just as we got ahead of the Soviets with MIRVS. As sure as I'm standing here, if we perfect the laser weapon, do you know what the Soviets are going to do? Obviously the same -- they're going to perfect the laser weapon. The arms race continues and we become not more secure, but less secure, and we have less and less money for the kinds of things that are really important.

Now, let me shift back to my assigned topic: that is, this whole area of international education. I'm going to primarily talk about language. I am really concerned about the whole cultural dimension -- about our provincialism, about our failure to look beyond our own borders.

We're the only nation on the face of the Earth where you can go through grade school, high school, and college, get a Ph.D., and never have a year of a foreign language.

I have done a fair amount of traveling throughout my life, most of it -- I hasten to add -- as a journalist not as a member of the House or the Senate. I think I have some sensitivity to the international equation. But all of a sudden, when the hostages were taken in Teheran, I started reading about Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims, and I realized my culture had prepared me for our country. I know the various divisions, and know them reasonably well, of Christianity and Judaism. But what I know about the Muslim world, what I know about the Buddhist world, and what I know about the beliefs of most people on the face of the Earth is awfully, awfully limited.

Foreign languages is an area where we can gauge our shortcomings, so I'm going to primarily talk about that here.

First, where are we? We're the only nation on the face of the Earth where you can go through grade school, high school, and college, get a Ph.D., and never have a year of a foreign language. There has been, in the last few years, a slight improvement in the numbers taking language courses at the college level. During the Vietnam conflict, when students took over many of our campuses and demanded that they get rid of requirements, we went downhill dramatically. We have started to come up just slightly, but this may be a temporary

response because of demographic factors.

The second reality is that our colleges, very shortly, are really going to be scrambling for students. And as the need to get students on the campuses increases, the requirements are likely to go down. I hope I am wrong on that, and you people in this room are part of where we go on that.

A third reality is that we have a decreasing percentage of faculty members on our college campuses who are studying or teaching abroad. My assumption is that the same is true for elementary and secondary school teachers also -- though I have not seen any documentation on that.

I just thought of a fourth reality while talking here to your president, Michael Bowler of *The Baltimore Sun*. He mentioned that *The Baltimore Sun* newspapers still maintain a foreign bureau -- very few newspapers do anymore. In this world that needs more and more understanding, we have fewer and fewer American journalists serving abroad.

Well, what harm is done in all of this? First, cultural harm. We simply are not enriching ourselves as we should. You can go to a cocktail party and there are three things you can say you know nothing about -- and there is no social stigma. One's poetry, one's opera, and the third is foreign languages. No, no problems at all. This reminds me of what a famous reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*, H.L. Mencken, once said, 'If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for me.'

The second problem that we face as a result is in the area of security. We cannot exaggerate the importance of this to what's happening in Libya, what's happening in Central America, and what's

happening in nuclear testing.

Let me just tell you when I first understood what kind of world we're living in. Down in Arkansas, about four or five years ago, an Air Force sergeant was walking along and accidentally dropped a wrench, which fell through some boards and broke a little aluminum tube, and a series of things happened. A Titan II missile went up in the air and landed in a wooded field some miles away. The warhead did not explode, but the newspapers reported that it was a nine megaton warhead.

And I got to thinking, 'you know, I don't understand what that means.' We, if I can speak as a journalist now, use words without trying to translate them into practical terms for our readers. I was one of those readers who did not understand what you were writing about, so I asked the Congressional Research Service. I said, 'Tell me in practical terms what nine megatons is.' And they gave me two answers. One is, if you take all the bombs of World War II, including Nagasaki and Hiroshima, they total two megatons. Or number two, if you read in El Salvador or Lebanon or some place about a car blowing up, ordinarily that would be one or two or three pounds of TNT. In TNT equivalency terms, a megaton is a railroad freight train, 300 miles long, loaded with TNT. So, nine megatons is a freight train 2,700 miles long -- almost from Baltimore to Los Angeles.

We have the ability, in just a matter of hours, to create a world where never again is the laughter of a child going to be heard, never again is a blade of grass going to grow. And in that world, we need all the understanding that we can get.

China, today, has 19,903 students in the United States; we have 69 American students in China. Now...that disparity obviously isn't in our self-interest.

Regarding security problems: the Secretary of the Army asked me to have lunch with him because he's concerned about our foreign language proficiency, as it relates to defense. Caspar Weinberger has spoken to me several times about it.

Of the 52 hostages taken in Teheran, six spoke Farsi, the language of the people there. Only two spoke it fluently. One of the hostages testified before my subcommittee and said, 'We didn't understand what was happening in the streets of Teheran. We were speaking to the elite in English.'

The United States has the only foreign service in the world you can get into without knowing a foreign language. Clearly, this is a problem. I have more illustrations here than I have time, but the security problems are real.

Let me just give you two statistics to illustrate this and to get into the next point of economics. China, today, has 19,903 students in the United States; we have 69 American students in China. Now, whether it is from the viewpoint of security in understanding China or whether it is from the viewpoint of economics in understanding China in order to sell to China -- that disparity obviously isn't in our self-interest. Japan has 11,223 students in the United States; we have 634 students in Japan.

The third area where we're hurting

General Motors comes out with a car called a Nova. 'No va' in Spanish means it doesn't go! And in all of Latin America and the Caribbean, it didn't sell.

ourselves is economics. We have a $148 billion trade deficit. If you use the traditional measurements of $30,000 per job, that trade deficit means 4.9 million jobs. This, you know, is a gargantuan thing. That deficit is primarily caused by the overvalued dollar.

The second major reason we have this deficit is that we just haven't paid attention to trade. We haven't been tough enough simply because trade has been a peripheral thing that we didn't really need to pay much attention to.

A third reason for the trade deficit is, frankly, that we haven't learned foreign languages. A very simple lesson in life: if you want to buy, you can buy in any language; if you want to sell, you have to speak the language of your customer. New York City alone has over 10,000 Japanese sales personnel, and all of them speak English. In all of Japan today we have approximately 900 sales personnel, and most of them do not speak Japanese. Who sells more? Well, the answer is fairly obvious.

And we do stupid things. General Motors comes out with a car called a Nova. 'No va' in Spanish means it doesn't go! And in all of Latin America and the Caribbean, it didn't sell. We laugh, but we're talking about jobs. 'Come alive with Pepsi' came out translated in a foreign edition of the

Reader's Digest, 'Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave.' There are a host of other illustrations that can be used. We are hurting ourselves by our provincialism.

Let me just give you one example that came across my desk yesterday. I had a visitor, a court translator/interpreter, come into my office. There's the pizza trial in New York, a major trial involving the syndicate.

What has happened is that we have now paid one person over $2,000 for translating Sicilian in this particular case. As it turns out from the transcript, we have somebody who didn't know Sicilian very well.

The fact is that he can't write Sicilian. He says he can understand it, but he can't write it: 'Nobody asked me if I could write Sicilian.'

The attorney says, 'Did you ask anybody whether or not it would be appropriate for you to write it down in Sicilian to determine whether or not you believe what you heard was in fact what you heard on the tape?'

'I don't believe I did.'

This translator,who we have paid over $2,000 in the last years, says in response to specific questions, 'I'm not that great when it comes to vocabulary. You're talking about nouns and verbs. I learned Sicilian which is ancient; it is a very old Sicilian that I speak.'

The attorney asks, 'By the way, have you ever become certified as a court translator?'

'No sir.'

'Have you ever taken any tests to become certified as a court translator?'

'No sir.'

'Are you a member of any international professional translators' organization?'

'No sir.'

'Are you aware that any exists?'

'If there are, I am not aware of them.'

'Have you ever had any academic training in languages?'

'No sir.'

There are other illustrations in there, but the point is we're hurting ourselves.

So, what do we do about it? First of all, **you** -- as reporters -- have to do something about it. In our elementary schools and secondary schools, primary leadership is going to have to come from you and other citizens. It is going to come from the state governments and local governments. It is not going to come from the federal government. I want to see the federal government put some carrots out there, and I am pushing in that direction. In virtually every country on the face of the Earth, you learn foreign languages in elementary school. But, fewer than one percent of our elementary school students learn foreign languages. There's no excuse for that.

And we hurt ourselves in a variety of ways. You may have read that the Chrysler/Mitsubishi plant is going to be built in Bloomington, Illinois. The president of Mitsubishi was in my office a few weeks ago and I said, 'I'm curious, Mr. President, why Chrysler/Mitsubishi ends up in Bloomington, yet hundreds of communities wanted you and all kinds of states were pushing.' And he said, 'Well, there are a variety of reasons, and your state was very generous,' and so forth. But he said, 'One of the key factors was Bloomington had a sister city relationship with a city in Japan for 25 years, and in the Bloomington schools for the last three years they've been teaching Japanese, and we thought we

would be welcomed in that community.' People in Bloomington who had the good sense to say we are going to enrich our students, our children in our schools, ended up enriching themselves in the process.

At the college level, community colleges I regret to say -- and I am a great backer of community colleges -- are among the worst as far as any international aspect. We clearly ought to be doing more.

And at the college level in general, I hope we can do some things. I believe when the Higher Education Reauthorization Act is finally passed, an amendment that I have been able to get in both the House and the Senate version, is going to provide a little help. It is not as much help as what passed in the House a couple of years ago, but it is at least a carrot to colleges and universities to do something.

Imagine that a few decades ago . . . Mikhail Gorbachev was an exchange student for one year at Eureka College in Illinois . . . and Ronald Reagan was an exchange student for one year at the University of Moscow. Now take some imagination to imagine either of these. We'd be living in a dramatically different world.

And if colleges and universities start demanding languages for either entrance or for graduation, inevitably you're going to see high schools demanding it more and pushing it more. It's going to help all the way around. The reality is we need some carrots out there -- that's

how we make progress in this country.

In the area of foreign service: Number one, we ought to require foreign languages to get into the foreign service. Why we do not baffles me.

I got an amendment adopted to the Foreign Service Act two years ago that required the Secretary of State to designate two embassies where everyone in the embassy, including the guards and secretaries, had to speak the language of the country. Alexander Haig was Secretary of State then. He designated Senegal and Uruguay as the two nations. I have just received the informal report from the State Department and from the two ambassadors, and it is glowing. They said it meant an unbelievable change in the effectiveness of those embassies. It was not an unbelievable change as far as I'm concerned. But, the question is now what do we do with it? The State Department is supposed to come to me with a recommendation. I hope there are editorial writers and education writers around this country that pay attention to that.

And in the area of exchanges: we're just not doing anything close to what we ought to be doing.

Let's look at Central America right now. Some of those who criticize us for opposing Contra aid say we're not doing anything to fight Marxism. Let me just give you one illustration of what we could do if we really wanted to fight Marxism. In Central America today, the United States offers 391 scholarships to young people to go to college in this country. The Soviets, Cuba, and the other Warsaw Pact countries offer approximately 7,500. You don't need to be a political scientist to recognize that you can win a battle in Nicaragua

and lose the war. I don't suggest that every student who goes to the University of Moscow or the University of Leningrad comes back a dedicated communist. But by and large, those who go to the University of Illinois or Johns Hopkins are going to come back to their countries with a favorable view of our country and some ties here.

We now spend more money to construct a mile of interstate highway than we do on all of our exchanges with the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries.

Let me stretch your imagination. Imagine that a few decades ago, a man by the name of Mikhail Gorbachev was an exchange student for one year at Eureka College in Illinois and a man by the name of Ronald Reagan was an exchange student for one year at the University of Moscow. Now take some time to imagine the result. We'd be living in a dramatically different world.

I don't know who the future Gorbachevs or Reagans are, but we ought to give them the chance to understand each other. Not that we're going to like the Soviet system. I don't like their system, and they don't like ours; but let's not miscalculate.

Why do we spend all this money on arms? Because we fear each other. Why do we fear each other? In the large measure, because we do not understand each other. And yet what we're doing today is spending less and less on understanding, and more and more on arms. I suggest to you that, ultimately, that's a catastrophic course. You are the people who are going to have to help change it.

I would add one final point. One other thing I hope you help stimulate us to do is to dream. One of the things that is

wrong right now is that the Administration proposes we cut back on education programs and so I am forced, and others are forced, into fighting for the status quo -- that's basically what we're doing. There is no such thing as the status quo for a nation, a newspaper or a community. You're either moving ahead or slipping backwards, and I fear the reality is that we're gradually slipping backwards.

We ought to be dreaming. We ought to be dreaming about what we can do for this nation. How do we build quality schools in the central city of Chicago and every other urban area? How do we make sure rural poor kids have a real chance in our country? How do we build in international education the kind of tomorrow that we ought to build? Well, you're the people who are going to have to help us dream -- and that is perhaps as important a role as you can have.

Thank you.

ABOUT EWA

The Education Writers Association was organized in 1947 by a group of newspaper reporters covering the annual convention of the National Education Association.

The organization's purpose then and now is to work for the improvement of education reporting to the public.

EWA has grown considerably since 1947. We have more than 475 members in most of the states. Our membership now includes television and radio reporters who specialize in covering education. Associate members include school and college public information officers and other communicators who work for educational institutions and organizations.

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